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OUR DUTY IN CUBA.

BY CHARLES A. CONANT.

THE United States have a duty to perform in Cuba which was definitely assumed by treaty with Spain, and afterwards defined by the voluntary act of the two Houses of Congress. The treaty with Spain declared that the United States would maintain order during the American occupation of Cuba. It was, indeed, prescribed that the obligations of the United States were limited to the period of occupancy; but our Government declared that "it will, upon the termination of such occupancy, advise any government established in the Island to assume the same obligations." This obligation of the United States to the world was further strengthened by the language of the Platt Amendment to the Army Appropriation Act of March 2nd, 1901, which declared, among other things:

"That the Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the Government of Cuba."

It is in pursuance of these obligations to the civilized world that United States troops are now in Cuba, and that the Government is being administered by an American Provisional Governor appointed by the President of the United States. Under such conditions, the question becomes important how far the United States should go in establishing sound political and economic conditions in Cuba and meeting the wishes of those of her people who desire a stable and progressive Government.

A very short time in Cuba brings home to one the fact that nearly every member of the business and financial community

prefers American control to native government. Not Americans only, but English, German, French and even Spanish merchants and bankers feel that their interests will be safer under American authority than under a native Cuban Republic. The reason for this is found in the legacy of shiftlessness and idleness left by the long wars among the lower orders of the population. If Cuba were South Carolina or Louisiana, it would be a question of race, for on the one side are arrayed substantially all the whites and on the other side the blacks. In Cuba, however, the race question is only an incident. Between the whites and blacks is a large population of mixed blood, shading imperceptibly from the almost black to the practically white. Traces of negro ancestry carry in themselves no such social stigma as in the United States. Apart from a few old families which have kept pure their Spanish blood, the inhabitants of the middle class—professional men, clerks and shopkeepers—are in considerable proportion persons of mixed blood. No hard and fast line is drawn against them because they are not pure Caucasians.

The essential question, therefore, is not one of race, but of the control of the Island on the one hand by those who have something at stake, and on the other hand by those who by many years of nomadic life, looting and marauding have lost much of the disposition to labor and much of the sense of civic responsibility. The conservative men of Cuba are determined that the latter element shall not become their governors, but there is great danger that this will occur if order is not enforced with a strong hand.

The President of the United States has declared that the United States will withdraw from Cuba and remit the Government to the Cuban people as soon as conditions will permit. In pursuance of this policy, Secretary Taft announced in a letter written before leaving Havana last month that a census of the Island would be taken, and that this would be followed at intervals by the municipal and provincial elections, by the Presidential election, and afterward by the surrender of the Government by the United States to the new President and the Congress chosen in the elections. Secretary Taft thought it prudent, however, to add this significant clause:

“The carrying out of this plan is, of course, strictly dependent upon the tranquillity of the country, which must continue through the two

elections and must give assurance of the stability of the new Government, because without this the United States will not be discharging the obligations devolving upon it by reason of the intervention."

The census of the Island will probably require about six months, and some interval will elapse after its completion before the holding of the first elections. If these pass off peaceably, the Presidential election will then be in order, but not for an interval of at least three months. Then, under the Constitution of Cuba, one hundred days are to elapse before the inauguration of the new President and the surrender to him of the authority which is now being exercised by Governor Magoon. With the delays which usually accompany important Governmental measures, these various steps will extend the period of American occupation practically to the end of the year 1908, if not longer. Any hitch or jar in the process of ascertaining the popular will and installing the new Government will cause additional delay.

Great rejoicing was felt among the sugar-planters, merchants and bankers of Cuba when this announcement was made by Secretary Taft. The planters, with the bankers upon whom they rely for advances, felt that they would be able to harvest their crops and export their products under conditions of security for another two years. They would have been even better satisfied with the definite assurance that the United States would not withdraw from Cuba, but in view of the resolute position of President Roosevelt, that the Cubans should have self-government if they were capable of carrying it on, it was not possible for Secretary Taft to go farther than he did go.

Having thus obtained the assurance of security for two years, far-sighted business men and statesmen in Cuba are naturally turning their attention to the functions which the American Government is exercising. Thus far, the policy of Governor Magoon has been, perhaps wisely, a policy of meddling as little as possible with the ordinary processes of administration. In the language of the leading Spanish journal, the Government of the first intervention "dictated laws, made reforms, established new forms of administration, and worked efficaciously for the country's social betterment"; but, says the Spanish journal, the "*Diario de la Marina*":

"The character of the provisional Government now in force is altogether different. Where before there were creative activity, regenerative

work, fecund spontaneity, resoluteness, energy and quick accomplishment, there are inertia, indifference and paralysis. The Government of intervention seems to propose to itself no other end than the maintenance of material peace, the preservation of public order."

It is then urged that, since the United States by intervention checked the creative functions of the Cuban state, it should not neglect to exercise all of its authority for the protection and active direction of Cuban affairs. In other words, in summing up the necessities of the situation, "the Government of intervention should not be a mere sterile parenthesis or hiatus in the political life of Cuba."

This definition of the proper functions of the American Government is apparently intended less as a criticism of what has been done in the past than as an expression in favor of doing something more constructive in the future. Only since the visit of Secretary Taft has it become clear that American authority will continue long enough to permit definite constructive measures. Now that it is clear that this opportunity will exist, the most far-sighted residents of Cuba appear to believe that the opportunity should be taken advantage of. If the American Government honestly intends, as President Roosevelt and Secretary Taft so emphatically declare, to return Cuba to the control of her own people, then, obviously, this result will be more certainly attained by turning over to the Cuban people an efficient working machine, rather than one which has been allowed to rust by disuse or which has become out of date by neglect to adopt the latest and most efficient mechanism. President Roosevelt, with that love of action which has so endeared him to the American people, should be quick to catch the significance of this opportunity—to do in Cuba, as far as possible in a short time, the creative work done by Lord Cromer in Egypt.

Little of a constructive character was done by the Cuban Congress during the four years of self-government in Cuba. Its activities were limited largely to the issuing of loans for paying the soldiers, and to granting franchises which were earnestly sought by a certain type of Americans. To preserve, however, is much easier than to build up. If the American Government should adopt the same constructive policy which during the first intervention gave clean streets to Havana, stamped out yellow fever, introduced the American system of bookkeeping into the

Treasury accounts, and prepared the way for improved means of communication, the new forms of administration created would probably in many cases be carried on without difficulty by the Cuban Government, where it could hardly be expected to take up the work of their creation.

Among the reforms which might well be set on foot by the American Government, are the organization of the banking system upon the basis of official inspection and public reports, which would protect the people against unsound banking; the organization of the fiscal service so as to return to the channels of trade the large surplus accumulating in the Treasury; the introduction of a national subsidiary silver coinage and a national gold standard; the organization of postal savings-banks, which are needed to instil the essential lesson of thrift into the people; and, perhaps, reform of the system of taxation. Most of these reforms are of a character which could be put into operation without friction within a short period of time, and they would tend so to improve economic conditions in the Island that the prospect of stability under a restored Cuban Government would be vastly greater than if such reforms were not undertaken.

The adoption of broad economic reforms might tend to solve in some measure the political problem, as well as the economic one. While many of the men who spent many years in the revolution, bivouacking, marching and raiding, are disinclined to labor, yet those who are would probably be better contented if the large surplus in the Cuban Treasury began to be disbursed for important public works. There is no doubt that Cuba badly needs good roads and other improvements, and the money for much of this work is already in the Treasury. Labor on the plantations is well paid, the most unskilled often demanding two *pesos*, which is the equivalent of \$1.80 in American money. Some of the plantation-owners find difficulty in getting labor even at these prices, but the question is probably one of locality, rather than of the absolute lack of proper labor on the Island. If measures could be devised which would put at honest work some of the revolutionary soldiers who loiter about Havana and other cities, they would be restored to the ranks of self-supporting citizens, and the Government would be relieved in a measure of the dangers of an idle and discontented proletariat.

If the Government of Cuba is restored to her own people, it

will still be necessary, in the opinion of conservative Cubans, for the United States to exercise a stronger influence in the future than has been exercised in the recent past. The American Minister has the authority under the Platt amendment to intervene to check unwise legislation. Metes and bounds have not yet been set, however, to the measure and the frequency of this intervention. It would probably greatly strengthen the position of the American Minister and facilitate his work if he were aided by a financial adviser who devoted his entire time to aiding the Cuban Government in promoting the economic progress of the Island. The task of the American Minister to Cuba would be simplified if he could lean upon such an official, with the understanding that behind them both stood the entire moral force of the United States. Probably some such solution as this is the only way of avoiding future intervention. Such a solution is essential in any case to assure the business community of Cuba that order and respect for law and contracts will prevail continuously in Cuba, unless circumstances compel the United States to take the more drastic action of converting into a permanent Government the present provisional one.

The future of Cuba is bright if she is well governed. The natural resources of the country in sugar and tobacco alone can be greatly enlarged with proper railroad facilities, with the return of the blacks to honest labor, and with the assurance of good government; but capital will not be invested in important permanent improvements, like railway extensions, tramways and new mills, until order under some form of government is permanently assured. It should be the mission of the United States to give this assurance. It is not incompatible with self-government in Cuba, provided that government is sane and progressive. To this result the present Provisional Government of Cuba will contribute if it introduces into the Island some of the methods and the constructive reforms which have made Egypt blossom as a rose under British authority, and which made the American flag welcome in the early days in Florida, in Louisiana, in Texas, and in California, and still make it welcome wherever it is planted.

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